

**Testimony by Andargachew Tsege Member, Central Council Coalition for Unity  
and Democracy Party**

**before The House International Relations Subcommittee on Africa, Global  
Human Rights and International Operations**

**on Ethiopia's Troubled Internal Situation**

**March 28, 2006**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Thank you distinguished Congresswomen and Congressmen.

Thank you for the invitation to testify at this important hearing.

I hope my testimony will be useful in adding value to the proposed bill: HR4423.

1 - My association with the current government in Ethiopia began long before EPRDF took power. In 1991, I came back from exile in London to help the government of Meles Zenawi.

In 1992 I was asked by EPRDF to stand for election for the city council. It was not a real election. I was elected the general secretary of the city council.

At this time I began to sense that all was not right. I realized that all the EPRDF talk about democracy was a sham, the leaders were pretend democrats.

I resigned.

I left the country in 1993.

In March of 2005 to fulfill a promise I made to help the election effort I returned to Ethiopia. I worked hard as an organizer, campaigner, and election observer.

The campaign itself went well. Of course, people were beaten, imprisoned, and killed. But our hope for democracy made us think those problems were small. We did not realize it would get much worse.

Meles's party lost the election. But a day after election day, it declared itself the winner and started banning civil and democratic rights.

People came out into the street. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, the government murdered innocent people in cold blood. Thousands were imprisoned.

I became one of the thousands. Soldiers came to my father's house. I was beaten badly, my left eye smashed with a rifle butt. I ended up in the Zewai concentration camp.

In prison, soldiers used a common razor to shave the heads of detainees. Many prisoners were HIV positive. Imagine the disregard for life.

Like many of my fellow prisoners, I contracted malaria. But the worst aspect of my experience was witnessing the nasty ethnic dimension of the whole operation. Something new and strange in Ethiopia.

2 - After the stolen elections, the voters of Ethiopia asked CUD leaders not to join a corrupted Parliament. Meles had changed Parliamentary rules so as to make any minority party completely ineffective. The CUD presented an eight point pre-condition to join parliament. But EPRDF refused to negotiate. Instead, they charged CUD leadership with treason, an offense which carries the death penalty.

Mass arrests and killings, house to house searches, and robbing people of their life savings began. The scale of repression has exceeded Ethiopia's darkest hours during the military dictatorship. The entire leadership of the CUD, independent journalists, and civic society leaders have been imprisoned with trumped up charges of treason and genocide. I am charged in absentia with the same crimes. As are others in this very room.

Hidden from the eyes of the international media and community, Ethiopia's rural farmers have suffered the brunt of the repression. Silent evenings in rural Ethiopia have been replaced by the heart wrenching cries of peasants tortured by EPRDF cadres.

3 - I know these men in power.

As the world rejoiced the end of the cold war, the EPRDF was lamenting the loss of the Soviet Union as a power.

I recall the first congress held in 1992. The EPRDF presented a paper explaining that they had managed to stick to the plan of delaying economic reform, by "deceiving the Americans."

Today in Ethiopia, political and economic power is held by a small clique of people within the ruling party.

4 - This is why I believe that legislation such as that proposed by Chairman Smith is essential.

Legislation must have the necessary proposals to fight the continued illegal accumulation of wealth and power by tyrants.

It deals with the need to change attitude and practice to bring about genuine democratization and economic liberalization.

The question that remains is how to break EPRDF ideological resistance to make the hopes of the bill a reality.

5 - Before I conclude, I would like to mention one important issue.

These days, the attitude of America towards Meles Zenawi has become a subject of discussion among Ethiopians.

Why is America not supporting us?

Why not condemn the Meles regime as the United States has condemned the tyrants of Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Belarus?

Most Ethiopians believe that Meles is not interested in defending the values that the terrorists want to attack. He does not believe at all in liberal values.

Ethiopians believe that their imprisoned leaders would do a better job than the Meles regime.

The CUD leadership is made up of individuals who have lived, studied, and worked in the West. They do not pretend to be anti terrorism. They are. And they are the victims of terrorism.

These leaders rightfully won the May 2005 election because voters believed in political and economic reform. They have the mandate and the support to defend those Liberal values.

These leaders and people are the true allies of the American people. Meanwhile, the current regime prepares to receive China's embrace.

It is both a moral and strategic imperative that America's leaders demand the immediate release of all political prisoners, without preconditions.

The continued support of this tyrant will prolong the misery of Ethiopia.

I thank you and look forward to answering the committee's questions.